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ABSTRACT

This study examined children's play interaction styles with unfamiliar peers; used mother-child and father-child dyadic qualities independently to predict children's social behavior; determined the relationship between children's individual behaviors and peer dyadic characteristics; and compared mother-child and father-child interactions on both global and component levels. Thirty-eight second graders were selected from 6 public schools in the Austin, Texas are. Three 24-minute play sessions, with mother, father, and an unfamiliar peer, were videotaped. Parent-child interactions were evaluated using a 5-dimension dyadic measure yielding an overall synchrony score. Peer dyadic quality was assessed using the Dyadic Relationship Q-Set. Results indicated that the communicative exchanges and affect dimensions of the father-child dyad were consistent with those of the mother-child dyad. A synchronous father-child interaction style was associated with children's warmth and resistance; however, no significant correlation was observed between mother-child interactions and children's individual behaviors. Children's active engagement of an unfamiliar peer was positively related to dyadic harmony and positive social orientation, and negatively related to control. Child compliance was positively associated with dyadic responsiveness and self-disclosure. Child self-defending was negatively related to dyadic responsiveness. Dyadic control was negatively related to both child demandingness and antagonism. (Author/KDFB)

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ED 401 021

Running head: CHILDREN'S INTERACTION STYLE WITH UNFAMILIAR PEERS

Predicting Children's Interactions with Unfamiliar Peers: Contributions of Parent-Child Interaction Style and Child Individual Behavior

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Abstract

The present study was designed to examine children's play interaction styles with an unfamiliar peer. Mother-child and father-child dyadic qualities were used independently to predict children's social behavior. Also, the associations of children's individual behaviors and peer dyadic characteristics were analyzed. Lastly, mother-child and father-child interactions, on both global and component levels, were compared. Thiry-eight second graders, 20 girls, were selected from 6 public schools in the Austin, Texas area. Three 24-min. play sessions, with mother, father, and an unfamiliar peer, were videotaped. Parent-child interactions were evaluated using a 5-dimension dyadic measure which yields an overall synchrony score. By contrast, peer dyadic quality was assessed using the Dyadic Relationship Q-set. The children's individual behaviors were also considered. Results indicated that dimensions of the father-child dyad (i.e., communicative exchanges and affect) were consistent with those of the mother-child dyad. In addition, a synchronous father-child interaction style was associated with children's individual behaviors (warmth and resistance); however, no significant correlation was observed between mother-child interactions and children's individual behaviors. Finally, several individual behaviors of children were associated with scores on the dyadic Q-set.

Predicting Children's Interactions with Unfamiliar Peers: Contributions of Parent-Child Interaction Style and Child Individual Behavior

The socialization process starts within the family context and later continues with exposure to other social settings such as school, neighborhood, sport teams and so on. In recent years, the study of socialization has focused on whether the type of relationships a child establishes within the family are associated with social relationships in other contexts. Although the interaction of children with peers can be predicted from certain styles of parent-child interaction (Harrist et al., 1994), the mechanism of that transference has not been elucidated.

Some researchers have studied family-peer links by analyzing individual behaviors; others have done that by assessing dyadic interactions. The present study uses dyadic measures within the family context to predict both dyadic interaction and individual behaviors within the peer context. It addresses the question of whether children learn from parents a style of interaction that influences their social behavior new situations.

The purpose of this study was to assess the links between family and peer social systems. Observations of mother-child and father-child interaction style were used to predict children's individual behavior with an unfamiliar peer. In addition, the relationship between ratings of children's individual behaviors and children's dyadic interaction with peers was examined.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Using class rosters from six elementary schools in Austin, Texas, families with children in the second grade were contacted via mail regarding participation in this study. Of these families, 38 agreed to participate (20 girls and 18 boys).

In a laboratory room at the University of Texas, the children were videotaped through a two-way mirror in three 24-min. play sessions. Each session

was with a different partner (mother, father, and unfamiliar peer of the same sex). The order of the partner was counterbalanced. The play sessions were each comprised of three segments: 8-minutes with a set of puppets, 8-minutes performing a building-blocks task, and 8-minutes of free play with a ball. Though each session had the same structure and types of toys, the actual sets of toys varied from one play session to the next (i.e., there were three puppet sets, three block sets, and three different balls).

Measures

Dyadic Measures

1) *Dyadic Relationships Q-set (DRQ)* (Park & Waters, 1989): The DRQ is designed to describe the behavior of pairs of children . For each dyad, the 55 items are sorted, depending on how well they represent the dyad, into a fixed normal distribution resulting in 7 piles. Each item then receives a score from 1 through 7, with 7 being "very like the dyad" and 1 being "very unlike the dyad". Cluster scores were determined based upon groupings of similar items and averaging their scores. The clusters are:

a) *Positive Social Orientation* (QPSO): M=4.51, sd=.64

b) *Cohesiveness* (QCOHESE): M=4.19, sd=1.7

c) *Harmony* (QHARMONY): M=4.94, sd=.93

d) *Control* (QCONTROL): M=2.55, sd=.39

e) *Responsiveness* (QRESPONS): M=4.71,sd=.72

f) *Self-Disclosure* (QSELFDIS): M=4.37, sd=.56

g) *Coordinated Play* (QCOORDIN): M=4.04, sd=.93

2) *Parent-Child Dyadic Ratings*: Ratings (5-point scale) were made every minute on 5 independent dimensions; therefore, each parent-child dyad received 24 ratings on each of the 5 dimensions.

These dimensions are:

a) *Communicative Exchanges* (COMMEX): Meaningful communicative exchanges including verbal and non-verbal expressions.

b) *Focus of Interest* (INT): Mutual engagement on the task. The dyad shares the same focus of attention; focus may be on the task or on a conversation.

c) *Harmony* (HARM): One partner's behavior follows or is contingent to the other's response.

d) *Balance* (BAL): Refers to equal level of participation by the dyad's members during that episode.

e) *Affect* (AFF): Quality of affective responses (positive affect warranted high rating).

For each parent-child dyad, the 24 ratings were averaged to come up with an overall score on each dimension. Four of these scales (INT, HAR, BAL, AFF) were used to determine the *Synchrony* of a parent-child dyad. Dyadic synchrony (SYNC) was characterized by high levels of INT (rating=5), high levels of HAR (rating=5), high levels of BAL (rating=5), and moderate to high levels of AFF (rating=3-5). For every interval (1 min.), a dyad received a score of 1 if it met these criteria (0 if it didn't). An overall SYNC score was computed for each parent-child dyad by determining the proportion of intervals characterized by synchrony.

In addition, father-child dyads were grouped separately from mother-child dyads (FSYNC *M*=.32, sd=.26; MSYNC *M*=.33, sd=.23). Medians for SYNC in each group were determined Those dyads with a FSYNC score greater than or equal to the median for father-child dyads received a rating of 1 (below med.=0) (FHISYNC=0,1). Mother-child dyads (MSYNC) were split in the same manner (MHISYNC=0,1). This resulted in four different groups: Mother-child high

synchrony, mother-child low synchrony, father-child high synchrony, and father-child low synchrony.

Individual Measures

Behavior Rating Scales (Buhrmester et al., 1992): These scales were developed to measure individual behaviors in dyadic and triadic interactions. Ratings were made for each child in the peer dyads on 13 scales after viewing a videotape of the entire interaction. Ratings ranged from 1 ("none") to 9 ("a lot") for each scale. The scales were:

a) *Warmth* (WARMTH): Displays positive affect physically or verbally. *M*=6.67, sd=1.43.

b) *Antagonism* (ANTAGON): Displays negative affect physically or verbally. *M*=1.61, sd=1.3

c) *Feeling Expression* (FEELEXP): Discloses feelings. *M*=2.39, sd=1.9.

d) *Feeling Acknowledgment* (FEELACK): Validates feelings of other family member. *M*=4.06, sd=2.18.

e) *Intrusion* (INTRUS): Does not allow others to speak for themselves. *M*=2.48, sd=1.84.

f) *Engagement/Involvement* (ENGAGE): Actively participates in session. *M*=7.55, sd=1.23.

g) *Demands* (DEMAND): Pressures for change. *M*=5.03, sd=2.04.

h) *Defends* (DEFENDS): Defends, explains, gives excuses, or apologizes for own point of view or actions. *M*=1.36, sd=.93.

i) *Resistance/Avoidance* (RESIST): Actively resists. *M*=2.15, sd=1.56.

j) *Compliance/Agreement* (COMPLY): Responds agreeably to request or demand. *M*=6.64, sd=1.71.

k) *Power Assertion* (POWER): Exerts control. *M*=1.03, sd=.17.

l)*Inductive Reasoning* (INDUCT): Cites natural consequences. *M*=1.00, sd=.00.

m)*Negotiation/Compromise* (NEGOT): Utilizes reasoning and compromises. *M*=3.27, sd=2.18.

Results

Interactions in Parent-Child Dyads

Correlations were performed between mother-child and father-child dyads on each of the 5 parent-child dyadic dimensions. Likewise, a correlation was performed between MSYNC and FSYNC scores. Significant correlations of mother- and father-child interactions by dimension are:

*Affect ($r=.37$, $p<.05$)

*Communicative Exchanges ($r=.43$, $p<.05$)

No significant correlation between MSYNC and FSYNC was observed.

High versus Low Synchrony Parent-Child Dyads

T-tests were performed to determine group differences between high and low synchrony mother-child dyads on each of the 13 child individual behavior ratings. This was repeated with the father-child dyads.

In father-child dyads, high and low synchrony differed significantly with two individual behavior ratings for children: resistance ($p<.05$) and warmth ($p<.05$). Mean scores indicate that high father-child synchrony was associated with children who exhibit low resistance and high warmth in interactions with peers. No such significant differences between high and low synchrony mother-child dyads were observed.

Interactions in Peer Dyads

Correlations were performed on half of the sample (every dyad was represented by child with odd number ID) to assess the relationship between the 7

cluster scores from the Q-set and the 13 child individual behavior ratings. These correlations can be found in Table 1.

The results suggest that an individual child's active engagement of an unfamiliar peer is positively associated with dyadic harmony and positive social orientation, and negatively associated with control. Compliance is negatively related to dyadic responsiveness and self-disclosure. Similarly, self defending is inversely associated with dyadic responsiveness. Finally, dyadic control is negatively related to both demandingness and antagonism in an individual child.

Discussion

The characteristics of the social interactions children develop with others have been traditionally studied within the family. Only recently those studies have been extended to other contexts (e.g., peers). It has been argued that the establishment of interactions in new social networks is highly influenced by the child's experiences within the family context. The literature suggests that there is a transference of certain factors (e.g., social skills, a model of relationships, expectations), from the family to other contexts. In relation to this issue, this study analyzed the question of whether or not there is a transference in styles of interaction from family to peers.

The results of this study showed a consistency in interaction style between father-child and mother-child dyads, but not between each of the parents-child and the unfamiliar peer-child dyads. Although previous studies have shown evidence of a consistency between family and peers interactions, most of these studies have observed interactions with close friends, who are well known to the target children. Under those conditions, it is difficult to clearly evaluate how much of the interaction with peers is carried out from the family, and how much is the effect of familiarity with the peer. The transfer of an interaction style might be better evaluated when the child is presented with a novel and unfamiliar situation and

partner (e.g., unfamiliar peer), than when the child is exposed to a well known peer (e.g., best friend).

Although interaction style as a whole was not consistent across family dyads and peer dyads, particular subgroups of the scales that defined synchrony did show such consistency. Particularly, harmony was consistent across all dyads in the study. Additionally, several scales (i.e., balance, focus of attention, and quality of affect) were significant or marginally significant in the correlation between father-child and peer-child dyadic interactions.

Notice that both, a global measure and specific dimensions of style of interaction were consistent within the family dyads, whereas only specific dimensions of that interaction style are consistent between father-child and peer-child dyads. The differences between father-child and mother-child interactions reflected in their correlations with peer-child interactions are not directly explained by the results of this study.

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Table 1
Correlation between Children's Individual Ratings and
Children's Dyadic Q-set Dimensions

	Antago.	Comply	Defends	Demand	Engage.
QCOHES	.16	-.20	.-24	.39	.42
QCONTROL	-.53*	.34	.04	-.65**	-.63*
QCOORDIN.	.19	-.26	-.41	.34	.45
QHARMONY	.22	-.47	-.34	.35	.64**
QPSO	.22	-.19	-.29	.46	.68**
QRESPONS.	.24	-.54*	-.62*	.08	.13
QSELF-DISC.	.37	-.52*	-.36	.16	.03

Note: Only the individual ratings with significant correlations were included.

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$